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141502Z Dec 04

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 006941

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/14/2014

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [TU](#)

SUBJECT: LIFE IN TURKEY'S MOST SOUTHEASTERN PROVINCE
BETTER, BUT FAR FROM PERFECT

Classified by Political Counselor John Kunstadter, E.O.
12958, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

This message is from AmConsul Adana.

¶1. (C) Summary: An early November visit to Hakkari province yielded a mixed picture of Turkey's heavily-Kurdish, most Southeastern province, wedged between Iran and Iraq. The once-oppressive security environment has been replaced by streets full of pedestrians, a hotel full of Istanbul visitors on a philanthropic mission, restaurants full of diners. However, since June, tension has increased with anti-PKK operations in the region, alleged intrusive searches at checkpoints, and an increased number of detentions for supporting terrorists. Access to detainees is given grudgingly but consistently and torture occurs but is no longer systematic, according to one human rights lawyer. Locals regard with skepticism the new Compensation Commissions for displaced villagers, worrying about excess documentary requirements and inadequate compensation. The city's pro-Kurdish DEHAP party mayor is focused on the lack of infrastructure and the city's 78% unemployment rate, along with a recent outbreak of stomach illness in the community. A number of village guards and their families have accepted government assistance and are building new communities outside the city. End Summary.

Relative "Paradise," Still Far From Perfect

¶2. (C) Attorney Rojbin Tugan, who has been practicing in Hakkari since 1996 with a focus on human rights, told poloff in early November that the atmosphere in Hakkari was unimaginably good compared to previous years. "Never did I think I'd see people out on the streets until midnight," she said, adding that, relatively speaking, "it is like a paradise in Hakkari now." Our observations were consistent with her remarks. Commerce is notably livelier and a store manager told us that Hakkari residents are out fishing in the river at night, like in the old days.

¶3. (C) Despite that difference, Tugan added that since June, tension had been mounting, with a steady increase in the number of detainees being held as supporters of terrorists. She is defending some of the suspects. She noted that the "Human Shield Initiative" group, which has been traveling to mountainous regions to protest clashes and anti-PKK operations, had many members detained in the region. She thinks the group is poorly-organized. She said that when detained, its members are charged with supporting terrorists, instead of less serious charges such as trespassing or obstructing justice.

¶4. (C) Tugan stated that access to detainees had been fairly good in Hakkari, and certainly much improved over previous years. Prison personnel are "not very happy about it," she said, but when she hears of detentions through family members and approaches the Security Directorate, they begrudgingly allow her immediate access. Tugan complained about a recent notice sent around by the public prosecutor placing restrictions on when attorneys could make jail visits. Tugan said this is illegal and she plans to discuss this with the prosecutor. She stated that while torture still exists, it is no longer systematic. However, Tugan claimed that jandarma are still conducting illegal searches and frisks at checkpoints in the area. She asserted that these actions are illegal. As Hakkari's leading human rights lawyer, she has experienced government harassment in the past and believes that security forces keep her under surveillance. Her work with UNHCR on refugee issues in the area has been especially sensitive, and has drawn reaction from JITEM (jandarma military intelligence), which in the past warned UNHCR not to visit her office.

¶5. (C) Tugan has applied to be a member of Hakkari Province's Compensation Commission, which is reviewing submissions for compensation based on Law 5233 (reftel); the Van Bar Association is supporting her. (Note: There is no Hakkari Bar, as the town only has eight lawyers, two of them not even from Hakkari. One is reportedly the wife of the local military commander. End Note.) Tugan claimed the Hakkari Governor is looking for a lawyer "sympathetic" to the

state to join the Committee (such as the commander's wife, she added). Although skeptical that many claims will meet the government's excessive documentary criteria requirement -- specifically proof of ownership of land and property -- she wants to be a part of the process.

¶6. (C) Tugan also recently launched a new organization to educate women and children about land mines and to raise awareness about the topic. According to some anti-land mine groups, Hakkari is reportedly one of the most heavily mined areas in Turkey, with both the government and the PKK having planted them in the 1990s. Tugan hopes to work with the EU on this project.

DEHAP Mayor: Provide Services to Reward Democratic Views

¶7. (SBU) Hakkari's pro-Kurdish DEHAP party mayor, elected in March 2004, appears energetic, and came across well. He began work for the party straight out of university, and stayed there until becoming a candidate in Hakkari in the latest local elections. The mayor and public prosecutor are both concerned with Hakkari's high unemployment rate: a staggering 78% (Note: Officially, unemployment is 9.3% nationwide. End Note.), with government providing one of very few sources of jobs.

¶8. (C) The mayor lamented the lack of investment and infrastructure in the city, predicting that years of neglect would be difficult to counteract quickly. He noted that Hakkari, in this "almost-EU country," had seen 1000 citizens going to the hospital in the past three weeks to cope with diarrhea, an illness uncommon in developed countries. The mayor said that the sewage and potable water infrastructure are in disrepair and there could be seepage, and citizens' immunity to such illness is low because of poor general public health conditions. Like Tugan, the mayor was downbeat on the prospects of the Compensation Law providing much in the way of relief to displaced citizens. The European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) provides better compensation for such claims, he said.

¶9. (C) He noted that despite the AK Party's attempt to win support in Hakkari, he received almost 70% of the vote. Hakkari, he said, a 100% ethnic Kurdish area bordering Iraq and Iran in a mountainous setting, had always kept its independent spirit. The government attaches great importance to "capturing this area," he claimed, but by using pressure rather than provision of services. "We want to give services to reward people for keeping a democratic view," he stated. To that end he is trying to cultivate good relationships with local government officials. For eight years, due to government suspicion of DEHAP and its predecessor party, the governor had not once visited the mayor's office, he said, but since he took office the governor had visited twice. While the local military commander had not yet visited, the mayor had been to pay a courtesy call on him.

Public Prosecutor Investigates Chemical Weapons Rumors

¶10. (C) In late summer and early fall, Hakkari human rights organizations focused on press reports alleging that Turkish security forces used "chemical matter" in an operation in nearby Berçelan Pastures. Reports of some livestock deaths in the area and the diarrhea outbreak in town were cited as ostensible support for these claims. Tugan was cautious about the reports. "I'm a lawyer," she said, "and I base my decisions on evidence and facts." She could not corroborate the press rumors.

¶11. (C) Hakkari's public prosecutor said he welcomed the opportunity to address the rumors. Given public concern about the incident, he said, the government formed a panel to investigate the claims. When the panel was criticized for not including a wide enough cross section of community and non-governmental leaders, he claimed a new panel was formed and that as of early November, they were awaiting results of forensics tests from water and plant life collected in the area. He said that the governor and other public officials had organized a visit and picnic in the area where the operation in question was undertaken, in order to demonstrate to citizens that there was nothing to fear. (Note: He, as an "investigator that must remain neutral," did not go. End note.) He did not appear defensive in discussing the question, and it appeared that government officials realized at least that the reports must be acknowledged and addressed rather than ignored. In press reports we saw subsequent to our visit, however, the local HRA representative had reportedly been indicted for spreading this "false" story to the press.

Istanbul Visitors...in Hakkari??

¶12. (SBU) Not only were the streets of Hakkari bustling, but

the main hotel in town was booked with a group from the Association to Support Contemporary Life. The group was in town to inaugurate three schools constructed in Hakkari province with donations from the group. (Note: This Istanbul-based secular NGO works on a grant basis and focuses on education, particularly education for young women. End Note.) Hakkari's Governor (who, without a diplomatic note, declined to meet with us) held a dinner in their honor the previous evening. Yet old images about Hakkari persist. One member of the group said that when she spoke with her mother and told her she was in Hakkari, her mother replied, "You must be crazy -- get on the first plane out of there!"

Returns Trickling to the Riverbanks

¶13. (SBU) Departing Hakkari toward the road that straddles Turkey's border with Iraq, there was a significant amount of new construction on the riverbanks just outside of town. Along the road we spoke with one village guard and his extended family who had come to the site three months earlier to build. (Note: This group of six families had moved from their village in 1990, when the government informed them it was no longer safe there.) According to them, all those being allowed to build and settle along the road were village guards and their families, and they were provided 1500 bricks and 30 wood crossbeams by the government. This particular settlement had just six houses, but there were many others along the road, and one had a school that appeared to be recently constructed. There was no water or electricity available for the community, and one claimed that they had been "deceived by the state." When they agreed to move to this area and build, he said, they did not realize they would be giving up rights to any compensation under the new compensation law. Still, there was no shortage of families who had taken up this offer, and significant settlement was happening along the river.

¶14. (C) Comment: Many aspects of the visit to Hakkari were encouraging: the access to detainees at least one lawyer is receiving; her comment that torture is no longer systematic; attempts by the governor and mayor to strengthen the relationship between the two offices; the fact that a skeptical public prosecutor actually felt the need to investigate and respond to allegations at Bercelan Pasture; and the general return to "normalcy." Yet the checkpoints surrounding the city illustrate that the government is still nervous about security in the area; the rumors of chemical weapons illustrate that the locals still regard the government with suspicion. At four checkpoints between Hakkari and neighboring Sirnak province, even diplomats are required to stop their vehicle, register with officials and wait 5-10 minutes. More striking than these security measures, however, is the 78% unemployment figure. Unless the government provides alternatives for Hakkari's people, the return to relative normalcy will lose its glow and discontent will fester into anger. If Turkey receives a positive answer from the EU, the EU is in for an eye-opener when it takes a closer look at what will be needed to inject life into the poorest regions of Turkey, like Hakkari. End comment.

EDELMAN